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SUBJECT: CEPGL STAFF DESCRIBE REGIONAL GROUPINGS TO SPECIAL ADVISOR WOLPE

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Economic Community of Great Lakes Countries (CEPGL) senior staff on November 10 briefed U.S. Great Lakes Special Advisor Dr. Howard Wolpe on CEPGL activities in the areas of peace and security, energy, and transportation, as well as on how the CEPGL coordinates with other regional groupings-something done through regular meetings, under the auspices of the UN Economic Commission for Africa. Since the CEPGL resumed operations in 2007 (after a 14-year hiatus), the EU has been the primary external donor, providing 5m euros so far to the CEPGL's operating budget. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) SA Wolpe and Ambassador met on November 10 in Gisenyi with CEPGL executive secretary-general Amb. Gabriel Toyi (a Burundian) and deputy secretaries-general Liliane Gashumba (a Rwandan) and Alphonse Ntumba Luaba (a Congolese). DOS officer Adam Keith and polcouns also attended. The tone of the meeting was cordial.

Regional Organizations

¶3. (SBU) Toyi noted that countries in the region belonged to a wide range of groupings, such as CEPGL, SADC, EAC, COMESA, CEEAC, and the Nile Basin Initiative, but explained that each organization had its own complementary missions, and that member countries held coordination meetings on a regular basis. The UN Economic Commission for Africa, which has a regional office in Kigali headed by a Mozambican, has convened such meetings on a twice-yearly basis since 2007. All the aforementioned organizations took part, except SADC. The most recent meeting was in April 2009, in the Seychelles; the next will take place November 30-December 2 in Kigali.

4.(SBU) CEPGL: According to Toyi, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) created the CEPGL in 1976. It became defunct in 1993 due to wars in the region, but the three countries revived the organization in 2007. The CEPGL, headquartered in Gisenyi, focuses on five areas of activity: 1) peace, security, democracy and good governance; 2) agriculture and food security; 3) energy, infrastructure and communications; 4) education and research; and 5) public and private investments. Toyi understands Uganda may want to join, added that the CEPGL both allows and would welcome this, but noted that Uganda has not formally applied. "We think it would be a good idea," he continued, if even Tanzania or Zambia were to join. (Note: During his visit to Uganda, Special advisor Wolpe asked the Ugandan officials if they desired entry into CEPGL. They indicated they did not and, in any event, had not been invited. End Note.)

¶5. (SBU) COMESA: The Common Market for Eastern and Southern

Africa (COMESA), formed in 1994 and headquartered in Lusaka, started as a preferential-trade zone. Now, Toyi said, it addressed issues such as customs and non-tariff barriers among its approximately 20 members, and had begun to move into other areas such as infrastructure. Its main focus, however, remains commerce.

¶6. (SBU) EAC: The East African Community (EAC), Toyi explained, was different because its goal is to form a supranational political union, with a single market and free movement of goods, services and people. He stressed that member states are serious about achieving political union. There is an ongoing public education campaign about the EAC, to which the public has responded favorably; the EAC has a Qto which the public has responded favorably; the EAC has a functioning legislative assembly and a court system at Arusha; the EAC also has a sizeable administration also at Arusha that convenes monthly meetings; and each member state has its own EAC Affairs minister.

¶7. (SBU) Nile Basin Initiative: This organization focuses on energy (especially hydro power and transmission lines), agriculture and environment, and water management. A Congolese citizen heads the organization, whose headquarters are in Entebbe.

¶8. (SBU) CEEAC: Like the CEPGL, the Economic Community of Central African States (CEEAC) was concerned with peace and security, agriculture, and infrastructure, as well as trade and development. CEEAC members include the DRC, Burundi, CAR, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, and Chad; Rwanda left the organization in 2007. The CEEAC is headquartered at Libreville.

¶9. (SBU) At the twice-yearly coordination meetings, the

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different groups compare and coordinate planned activities, in order to avoid duplication and decide which organization is best suited to take the lead on a given project. For example, because the CEPGL, CEEAC, EAC and Nile Basin Initiative were all involved in planning the interconnection of power transmission lines, members decided to assign that responsibility to the Nile Basin Initiative. "The key point for donors," Toyi said, "is that it is not bad to have many different organizations, pursuing different but coordinated activities" to help the region develop.

CEPGL Activities and Issues

¶10. (SBU) According to Toyi, the EU is the CEPGL's main donor, having in 2007 signed an agreement to provide 50m euros, 5m of which have been disbursed so far. The Belgians promised 3m euros a year starting in 2010, but have not yet disbursed any, and France promised 500,000 euros by the end of 2009 to pay for institutional support and technical assistance (NFI). The CEPGL met with DFID, but the UK has not provided or promised any funding. When asked about the CEPGL's operating budget, Toyi said it was 1.5m euros during the previous budget year (NFI), but would rise to 4m euros for the next year--the difference due in part to the fact that Congolese colleagues had only recently rejoined the organization. The CEPGL's budget was likely to increase in future years, due to the number of anticipated projects.

¶11. (SBU) In the area of peace and security, the CEPGL helped facilitate communication among its members. CEPGL defense ministers and military chiefs met in Goma in July 2009, Toyi noted, and military intelligence chiefs decided they should meet every six months. Ntumba Luaba reiterated this point, adding that members were planning to hold the next meeting of defense ministers and military chiefs in Kigali, before year's end. Experts from the three countries were discussing a mutual defense pact, he added, and provincial governors (NFI) met recently in Bukavu to discuss joint border patrols--an activity that might benefit from USG support. In

addition, Toyi noted that the three countries planned to hold a meeting within a few weeks to exchange lessons learned on demobilization of ex-combatants.

¶12. (SBU) According to Toyi, CEPGL countries also agreed to open their borders to each others' citizens, 24 hours a day. Already, 8000 people cross the Goma/Gisenyi border daily. The checkpoint there closes at midnight and reopens at 6:00a.m., but it will "soon" move to 24 hours operations, he said. Instability and insecurity in the DRC would not affect this, because such problems were "far from the border." Toyi added that the CEPGL also planned to organize in December or January a meeting on border demarcation, to address unresolved issues along the Burundi-Rwanda border, the Burundi-DRC border, and the Rwanda-DRC border near Goma/Gisenyi.

¶13. (SBU) Energy remained a main focus of the CEPGL, especially two planned hydroelectric projects on the Rusizi River, known as Rusizi III and IV. The EU in 2007 provided 2.8m euros to pay for feasibility studies, which a German firm is due to complete in the next three months. The total construction cost for the two plants is estimated at \$800m. Another project under study by a Rwandan-Congolese pilot QAnother project under study by a Rwandan-Congolese pilot committee was the planned joint Rwandan-Congolese exploitation of methane gas in Lake Kivu, which would provide over 200MW of electricity to the CEPGL power grid. The Government of the DRC, said Ntumba Luaba, viewed Rwanda's existing methane gas pilot project as a "positive experience." (Note: Both the proposed joint project and Rwanda's own pilot project are separate from a larger project currently under construction in Rwanda by U.S. private firm Contour Global. End Note.) Declaring that "energy is a huge need in all three countries," Toyi said CEPGL member countries planned to ask for donor support to help finance such projects.

¶14. (SBU) Regarding transportation infrastructure, Toyi said CEPGL members were considering several bridge projects linking their three countries, as well as a road from Gisenyi to the port of Goma (the EU is funding this study) and a road along the route Bujumbura-Cyangugu-Gisenyi-Goma (study completed and paid for by African Development Bank, or AfDB).

This last link would cost an estimated \$350m, with \$100m promised so far by the AfDB. As for railroad tracks, Toyi said the CEPGL planned to focus on extending a future line

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from Kigali to Gisenyi, Goma, and Kisangani, adding that the EAC was addressing the more easterly connection to Kigali. (Note: Neither Rwanda nor Burundi is linked by rail. End Note.)

¶15. (SBU) Finally, another prospective project is the revival of the CEPGL's development bank, which was due to officially reopen in late November but needed recapitalization because of non-performing loans mostly made in the DRC. Toyi said the he expected capital would come from Belgium, the AfDB, and the three member countries, and the CEPGL hoped that the USG, Sweden and Germany would in the future provide funds as well.

¶16. (SBU) Responding to Dr. Wolpe's question about why the DRC had been slow to rejoin the CEPGL, Ntumba Luaba explained that Congolese living outside the Kivus did not see any benefit in it. The Congolese government was now supportive, but more needed to be done to promote the CEPGL among Congolese in the rest of the country. "People think events in eastern Congo caused western Congo to suffer," he said. To address this, the CEPGL was notionally planning student and teacher exchanges between the three countries-university rectors had already met recently. Also, drawing on the Franco-German experience, it might be worthwhile to set up a volunteer corps of youths from the Great Lakes countries, to create joint teams that could work together for a year or two

"to help rebuild what we destroyed together" and improve mutual understanding.

COMMENT

¶17. (SBU) CEPGL leaders are eager for USG support or assistance; post will continue to engage with them and work to identify possible discrete areas--beyond simply providing funds--where we can make a difference. Absent from the CEPGL's discourse was any mention of the private sector funding or public-private partnerships; we will continue to nudge their thinking in this direction as well. End Comment.

¶18. (SBU) Dr. Wolpe cleared this cable before transmission.
SYMINGTON